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Letter dated 13 August 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the assessment of the work of the Security Council for the month of March 2018 during the presidency of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (see annex).

The assessment was prepared by the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations, in accordance with paragraph 136 of the note by the President of the Security Council of 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507), following consultations with other members of the Security Council.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Karel J. G. **van Oosterom**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 13 August 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Assessment of the work of the Security Council during the presidency of the Netherlands (March 2018)

Introduction

Under the presidency of the Netherlands in March 2018, the Security Council held 21 public meetings, including an open debate, and 2 private meetings, as well as 13 consultations of the whole, 1 briefing in consultations of the whole under the item "Any other business" and 1 informal interactive dialogue. The Council adopted five resolutions and agreed upon two presidential statements and eight press statements. Signature events of the presidency of the Netherlands included an open debate on the improvement of peacekeeping as well as thematic briefings on conflict and hunger and, on World Water Day, a briefing on the root causes of conflict in the Lake Chad basin, as a follow-up to Council resolution 2349 (2017) and the root causes identified in that resolution.

In accordance with the Organization's practice, the Netherlands began its presidency with the presentation of the provisional programme of work of the Security Council for the month, which was adopted at the Council's consultations of the whole on 1 March.

Africa

Peace and security in Africa: Lake Chad basin region

On 22 March, the Security Council held a briefing on the Lake Chad basin and the implementation of resolution 2349 (2017), under the agenda item on peace and security in Africa.

The Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed, an expert on remote sensing from the Lake Chad Basin Commission, Mohammed Bila, and a senior adviser on conflict from Adelphi (an independent think tank), Chitra Nagarajan, briefed the Security Council on the root causes of conflict in the Lake Chad basin, highlighting the importance of addressing the root causes of the current situation, which were linked to increasing climate variability and water scarcity, among other environmental factors, with regard to the challenges the Lake Chad basin region is facing. In addition, the speakers focused on the importance of risk assessments relating to climate change and ecological changes. They recommended that the United Nations system improve its risk assessments and analyses of issues related to climate and ecology and called for conflict-, gender- and climate-sensitive programming.

The members of the Security Council made a statement, and were followed by the Ambassador from Nigeria, who spoke on behalf of the four countries in the region. Members of the Council also highlighted the importance of regional efforts, such as the work of the Multinational Joint Task Force in pushing back Boko Haram. Many members confirmed the correlation between the adverse effects of climate change and the situation in the Lake Chad region, and the effects of climate change on the rise of violent extremism. In addition, several members highlighted the link between water scarcity, drought, desertification and land degradation and the deteriorating situation in the Lake Chad region. Some Council members called for improved risk

assessments and analyses for climate- and water-related risks relating to the conflict in the Lake Chad region and called for the United Nations Secretariat to strengthen reporting in those areas.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 6 March, the Security Council met with troop- and police-contributing countries in the presence of the members of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO). The Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Bintou Keita, briefed the audience on the implementation of the strategic review of MONUSCO. Troop-contributing countries expressed their concerns regarding the feasibility of the shift towards the "protection through projection" strategy. The strategy relies heavily on a high level of troop mobility and adequate situational awareness; however, the troops are short of mobility assets. Some Member States had questions regarding the effectiveness of the Intervention Brigade and underlined the importance of unity of command. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations provided more insight into operational planning and emphasized that there had not been a complete shift towards projection. "Protection through presence" remained a valid strategy in specific areas, while in other areas "protection through projection" would be more appropriate.

On 7 March, the Security Council was briefed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MONUSCO, Leila Zerrougui, in preparation for the renewal of the mandate of MONUSCO.

In the public meeting, the Special Representative presented the latest report of the Secretary-General. She welcomed progress in the technical preparations for the elections planned for 23 December 2018 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the completion of voter registration and the presentation of the budget, but expressed concern about the confidence of the population in the political process and called for the implementation of the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement signed on 31 December 2016. She called for the release of political prisoners and for the protection of fundamental freedoms, including the right to peaceful assembly. She expressed concern about the disproportionate use of force by security services during recent demonstrations. She further recommended that the current priorities in the MONUSCO mandate, namely the protection of civilians and the provision of support to the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement and the preparation of the elections, would be maintained in 2018.

After the Special Representative's briefing, all members of the Security Council spoke. Council members expressed support for the renewal of the MONUSCO mandate, including its two existing priorities. They welcomed the progress made towards the holding of the elections, including the updating of the voter register, and called on all stakeholders to implement the 31 December 2016 agreement. They condemned violence used during recent protests. Several delegations emphasized the importance of coordination with stakeholders in the region.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Vice-Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Léonard She Okitundu, exercising his right under rule 37 of the provisional rules of procedure, presented the views of his Government on the renewal of the MONUSCO mandate. He emphasized the need to neutralize armed groups in the eastern part of the country and the need to strengthen the Intervention Brigade.

During the ensuing closed consultations, Security Council members were briefed on the special investigations into the incidents in Semuliki and Kamanyola by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix. Following consultations of the whole, the President of the Council briefed the press

and informed them that the Council took note of the findings and called on the Secretariat and MONUSCO to report on the implementation of the recommendations.

On 19 March, the Security Council held a meeting on the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Council was briefed by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, women's rights activist and Coordinator of the Encadrement des femmes indigenes et des ménages vulnérables, Jeanine Bandu Bahati, and the Secretary-General of the Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Donatien Nshole. The speakers described with concern the rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation and its consequences for Congolese civilians, in particular women and girls. Council members shared their concern, with several delegations highlighting the need to end violence by armed groups and the holding of peaceful elections as conditions to improve the situation.

The Security Council issued a statement to the press on 22 March in which the members expressed great concern over the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation and the high number of internally displaced persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They commended the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their partners and donors for their efforts, called on Member States to urgently scale up funding and looked forward to the high-level humanitarian conference on the Democratic Republic of the Congo to be held in Geneva on 13 April.

On 27 March, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2409 (2018), and extended the mandate of MONUSCO for one year. The mandate continues to be focused on the protection of civilians and the provision of support to the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement and the preparation of elections. The Secretary-General was requested to report on the implementation of the agreement every 30 days, and was asked to prepare a contingency plan for the temporary reinforcement of MONUSCO if needed. Several delegations took the opportunity to explain their votes.

South Sudan

On 6 March, the Security Council met with troop- and police-contributing countries to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). The Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations briefed the audience on the implementation of the strategic review. Several troop-contributing countries took the opportunity to express their concerns with regard to the downsizing of UNMISS and stressed the need to take into account the persistently volatile security situation in the Mission's area of responsibility.

On 15 March, the Security Council adopted resolution 2406 (2018), extending the mandate of UNMISS by one year. In the resolution, the Council continued the Mission's mandate to prioritize the protection of civilians and, in addition, requested that UNMISS create conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, monitor and investigate human rights violations and support the implementation of the peace agreement and the peace process. In the resolution, the Council expressed its deep alarm over the increasing scope of the violence across the country and expressed its intention to consider all appropriate measures against those who undermined the peace, stability and security of South Sudan. It also stressed the need for accountability and called upon the Government of South Sudan to sign without further delay the memorandum of understanding with the African Union on establishing the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, and further called on the international community to extend support for the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan.

Somalia/Eritrea

On 13 March, the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea, Kairat Umarov, delivered his 120-day briefing, covering the period from November 2017 to February 2018, to Council members in closed consultations. The Chair updated the Council on activities of the Committee and the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea. The members of the Council welcomed the work of the Monitoring Group and engagement by the Government of Somalia. The members of the Council condemned the ongoing terrorist attacks perpetrated by Al-Shabaab, including the two terrorist attacks on 23 February 2018. The members of the Council welcomed the efforts of the Government of Somalia to continue improving its notifications to the Committee. They discussed the urgent need for improved weapons and ammunitions management in Somalia and called for partners to provide support. Many members reiterated their support for continuing efforts to organize a Chair's visit to the region.

Sudan

On 14 March, the Security Council held a public briefing followed by consultations of the whole. The Council received a briefing from the Joint African Union-United Nations Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), Jeremiah Mamabolo. The Special Representative briefed the Council on phase II of the reconfiguration of UNAMID, which was set to end on 30 June. The Special Representative also told the Council that the stalemate in the political process persisted and called upon Member States to use their bilateral channels to urge the parties to the conflict to sign a permanent cessation of hostilities agreement. The Council was also updated by the current Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan, Joanna Wronecka, on the activities of the Committee during the past 90 days. The Chair announced a visit to the Sudan in the month of April.

Following consultations of the whole, the President of the Security Council informed the press that all members welcomed the improved security situation in Darfur and stressed the need for an overarching political agreement. Council members welcomed the progress made and expressed support for the work of the Special Representative.

United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

On 21 March, the Security Council held closed consultations on the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and the situation in Western Sahara. The Council was briefed by the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Horst Köhler, and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

The Personal Envoy provided the Security Council with an update on the political process and the path forward. The briefing, which was based on information gathered from his visits to the region and consultations with stakeholders, provided an opportunity to share experiences and prospects. The Under-Secretary-General briefed the Council on the situation on the ground as well as on the functioning of the Mission. He also addressed the continued tensions in Guerguerat.

Following consultations of the whole, the President of the Security Council briefed the press on the Council's full support for the efforts of the Personal Envoy. The Council further welcomed the Personal Envoy's recent bilateral meetings with the parties and neighbouring countries to facilitate the relaunch of the negotiating

process with a new dynamic and a new spirit, leading to the resumption of a political process under the auspices of the Secretary-General. In that regard, the members of the Council underscored the importance of maintaining constructive engagement in an effort to advance the political process. Furthermore, the members of the Council expressed concern about the situation in Guerguerat and recalled the importance of maintaining the status quo, as mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Western Sahara (S/2018/277) and, in that regard, the need to fully implement resolution 2351 (2017).

Libya

On 21 March, the Security Council held a public meeting followed by consultations of the whole. The Council was briefed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya, Ghassan Salamé, by videoconference from Tripoli. The Special Representative gave an update to the Council on the implementation of the United Nations action plan for Libya and announced a final attempt to amend the Libyan Political Agreement. He stated that efforts to organize elections in 2018 had led to 2.5 million registered voters, 44 per cent of whom were women, and that a referendum law needed to be adopted by the House of Representatives in order to adopt the Constitution, the current draft of which remained contested by some parties, although its validity had been recognized by the Supreme Court on 14 February 2018. The Special Representative further expressed concern about continuing violence and the presence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al-Qaida. Armed groups continued to operate outside the law, perpetrating human rights abuses, including against migrants and refugees. The Special Representative expressed the willingness of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) to mediate between armed groups should they request it. He stated that the economic system of predation in Libya constituted the main obstacle to the political process and cemented the status quo. He called on the Council to send a clear message to Libyan leaders that this status quo was untenable. During the public briefing, Olof Skoog, in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1970 (2011) concerning Libya, gave an update on the work of the Committee. Four Council members spoke during the public meeting.

After the consultations of the whole, the President of the Security Council briefed the media, stating that the members of the Council reiterated their full support for the United Nations action plan for an inclusive, Libyan-owned political process and supported the leadership of the Special Representative. In addition, Council members underlined that the status quo was unsustainable, urged Libyan leaders to engage constructively in the dialogue process in a spirit of compromise and reiterated the importance of the meaningful participation of women. The members of the Council reiterated that there could be no military solution in Libya and condemned continued violence. They underlined the need for those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights, including against migrants, be held accountable. The members of the Council further underlined the importance of unifying the armed forces of Libya under civilian oversight and reiterated that the Libyan Political Agreement remained the only viable framework to end the Libyan political crisis ahead of the holding of elections and the finalization of the political transition. Two representatives welcomed the high percentage of women who registered to vote. Multiple representatives expressed concern about the human rights situation, in particular as it pertained to migrants.

United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia

On 27 March, in its resolution 2408 (2018), the Security Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) for an

additional year. The Mission will retain its current functions with regard to providing strategic support and advice to the Government of Somalia and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) on peacebuilding and State-building in the areas of governance, security sector reform and the rule of law, the development of a federal system, constitutional review and the coordination of international donor support. UNSOM will continue to assist the Government in building its capacity to promote respect for human rights and women's empowerment, to promote child protection, to prevent conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence and to strengthen justice institutions. In the resolution, the Council welcomed the development of a transition plan with a view to conducting a conditions-based, gradual handover of security from AMISOM to the Somali security forces. The Council also underlined that the coming year should see the swift implementation of critical agreements reached in 2017, particularly the outcomes of the high-level meetings held in Mogadishu in December 2017, and see further progress with regard to the constitutional review process and preparations for the delivery of inclusive, credible and transparent "one person, one vote" elections in 2020 and 2021.

Asia

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

On 21 March, the Security Council, acting under Article 41 of Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, adopted resolution 2407 (2018) and extended until 24 April 2019 the mandate of its eight member Panel of Experts assisting the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006) on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The Security Council decided that the mandate would also apply to measures imposed by resolutions 2270 (2016), 2321 (2016), 2356 (2017), 2371 (2017), 2375 (2017) and 2397 (2017). It requested the Panel to submit its midterm report by 7 September 2018 and its final report by 14 March 2019.

Europe

Briefing by the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

On 8 March, the Security Council held a public meeting to hear a briefing by the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, Angelino Alfano, on the priorities of the Italian chairpersonship of OSCE.

Delivering the annual briefing to the Security Council, the Chairperson-in-Office said that a crisis of mutual trust and confidence existed regarding the situation in Ukraine. There was only one way to rebuild trust, and that was to build dialogue and take concrete actions on the ground. OSCE expected new steps to be taken towards the implementation of the Minsk agreements. It had deployed a Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, which was essential in preventing a dangerous escalation of the crisis.

No nation was ever secure in isolation, the Chairperson-in-Office said, noting that Member States had a responsibility to ensure one another's security. That security would only be achieved when it was recognized that everyone was part of the same human race, and that the defence of human dignity was essential to liberty. That value, he said, was shared by the United Nations and OSCE.

The members of the Security Council commended the efforts of OSCE to build peace and stability in the region, within the framework of Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, and expressed their support for the priorities identified by Italy. Many Council members stated that the Minsk agreements remained the agreed basis for a peaceful resolution to the situation in the Donbass region, and referred to the Council's endorsement of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements in resolution 2202 (2015).

In addition to Ukraine, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office also discussed protracted conflicts in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria. On Georgia, he supported the Geneva international discussions and various informal initiatives, while on Nagorno-Karabakh he supported the work of the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group. Regarding Transnistria, he stated that the positive momentum already achieved needed to be maintained.

Member States expressed their support to the mediation efforts of OSCE and emphasized the importance of dialogue and peaceful solutions to the issues.

Some delegations expressed their support for the Minsk Group in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well as for the work being done in the five plus two format in relation to the Transnistrian conflict.

Letter dated 13 March 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

The Security Council met at the request of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on 14 March to discuss a letter dated 13 March 2018 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/218), to which was annexed a letter from the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Theresa May. The meeting format was changed from informal consultations to a briefing at the request of the Russian Federation. The annex to the letter said that two Russian nationals had been poisoned in Salisbury in the United Kingdom on 4 March and were in critical condition. A British police officer had also been exposed and was seriously ill. It further stated that a thorough investigation conducted by the British police had identified the chemical used in the incident as a "nerve agent from a class of chemical warfare agents known as Novichoks". On the basis of all the evidence, the United Kingdom had concluded that it was highly likely that the Russian Federation was responsible for the attack and that there were only two possible scenarios: either the attack had been carried out by the Russian Federation, or the Russian Federation had lost control of its stockpile of nerve agents.

Almost all members of the Security Council expressed grave concern regarding the use of a chemical weapon against civilians and the threat that posed to the international non-proliferation regime. Many called for respect for the Chemical Weapons Convention and looked forward to a full and thorough investigation. A delegation expressed the hope that the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation would be able to address and resolve the situation through direct contact and exchange of information in line with their responsibilities under the Convention. Other delegations called on the Russian Federation to respond to the questions directed to the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom in London by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom. A number of delegations underscored the belief that the Russian Federation was responsible for the attack. Several delegations emphasized that they would never accept impunity for those who used or developed toxic agents. Other delegations urged the Council to exercise caution when drawing conclusions regarding the

Salisbury attack. One delegation emphasized that the letter from the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom not only contained irresponsible statements but also threatened a sovereign State.

Middle East

Syrian Arab Republic

On 7 March, at the request of France and the United Kingdom, the Security Council was briefed in closed consultations by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, on the situation in eastern Ghutah and on the implementation of Council resolution 2401 (2018).

On 12 March, the Secretary-General reported on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), underscoring that the United Nations would leave no stone unturned as it contributed to finding a sustainable political solution to that end. Despite all difficulties, the Secretary-General expressed that it should be possible to have a cessation of hostilities, deliver aid, evacuate the sick and wounded, lift the sieges, accelerate humanitarian mine action throughout the Syrian Arab Republic and remove terrorist fighters on the Security Council's sanctions list from conflict zones without massive and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure.

On 16 March the Special Envoy briefed the Council by videoconference; the briefing was followed by consultations of the whole. The Special Envoy profoundly regretted the insufficient implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). He noted that direct negotiations between the Russian Federation and the Army of Islam had made it possible to establish a ceasefire in Duma for six days and send a humanitarian convoy, and that some delicate follow-up meetings were taking place. But violence continued to escalate in the rest of eastern Ghutah, as well as in Hama, Idlib and Dar'a. He also noted the continuous shelling of civilian areas under Government control in Damascus as well as the besieged enclaves of Fu'ah and Kafraya. He reported new allegations of the use of incendiary and chemical weapons, noting that the United Nations could neither confirm nor ignore them. He expressed particular concern about the situation in Afrin, the displacement of tens of thousands of civilians, water shortages and the restriction of movements. He underscored the special threats posed to the safety of women in areas of conflict. The Special Envoy also confirmed that the United Nations had attended the meeting in Astana on 14 March of a working group on the release of detainees, abductees and identification of mission persons, and called for progress on the detainees, abductees and missing persons file.

On the political front, the Special Envoy indicated that his team continued to consult on the formation of a constitutional committee to advance the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), trying to use the momentum of the Syrian national dialogue held in Sochi, Russian Federation, on 30 January 2018. He noted that the ministerial statement adopted by the Astana guarantors on 16 March recalled the outcome of the Sochi dialogue and recommitted to a political settlement under United Nations auspices. So far, he had not received a list of names that would allow him to ensure progress on the establishment of the constitutional committee.

The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, invited under rule 37 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, claimed that the Syrian Government was doing its utmost to ensure the security of all Syrian citizens and was fulfilling its obligations under resolution 2401 (2018). The Council members called for the full implementation of resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2401 (2018), reaffirmed that the latter applied to the whole of the Syrian Arab Republic, condemned the

violations of resolution 2401 (2018), reiterated the call for safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access, expressed full support for the Special Envoy and his efforts to establish a constitutional committee and urged Syrian parties to engage in good faith.

On 19 March, seven Member States requested a briefing by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, on the human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. During a procedural vote on the agenda requested by one Member State, the proposal did not obtain the necessary nine votes. Some of the countries that requested the meeting co-hosted an Arria formula meeting instead.

On 20 March the Security Council held an informal interactive dialogue on chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic that included briefings by the Director General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ahmet Üzümcü, and the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, on the basis of the fifty-third report of OPCW on progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. The dialogue took place in the context of reports on the continued use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and its standing obligations to OPCW under the Chemical Weapons Convention and Council resolution 2118 (2013). The fact-finding mission of OPCW continues to report its conclusions as to whether chemical weapons or toxic chemicals have been used in the country.

The members of the Security Council generally appreciated the opportunity to interact with the Director General and the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and expressed their support for the work of OPCW and the United Nations. The members of the Council reaffirmed that the use of chemical weapons constituted a serious violation of international law. They also reiterated that those individuals, entities, groups or Governments responsible for any use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. The vast majority of the Council regretted that it had been unable to renew the mandate of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. They reaffirmed the need for an independent and impartial accountability mechanism to that end. Council members also reiterated their support for the work of the fact-finding mission and stressed the need to ensure that the mission could work independently. Some Council members stressed the need for an impartial and professional fact-finding mission.

On March 27, the Security Council was briefed by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator on the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic; the briefing was followed by consultations of the whole. The Under-Secretary-General pressed parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic to implement resolution 2401 (2018) and allow unimpeded aid delivery throughout the country. Speaking by videoconference from Geneva, he said that more than 1,700 people had reportedly been killed in eastern Ghutah since the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) on 24 February. He also mentioned that at least 78 fatalities had been reported in Damascus from shells fired from eastern Ghutah. Meanwhile, nearly 52,000 civilians had taken refuge in eight shelters in rural Damascus, most of which were overcrowded, and had only limited access to food and medical assistance. It was imperative that humanitarian organizations reach people in eastern Ghutah, particularly in Duma. The Under-Secretary-General also referred to other places in which humanitarian needs continued to increase, including Raqqah and Rukban.

During the ensuing debate, delegates decried the uptick in fighting and urged parties to immediately and fully respect resolution 2401 (2018). During the consultations of the whole that followed the open briefing, the Under-Secretary-

General answered questions regarding the protection of those fleeing from and those remaining in eastern Ghutah.

Afghanistan/United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

On 8 March, the Security Council held a quarterly debate on the situation in Afghanistan and the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The debate was presided over by the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development of the Netherlands, Sigrid Kaag.

The debate coincided with International Women's Day and saw many of the Security Council members being represented by female delegates at the request of the President. The Council was briefed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of UNAMA, Tadamichi Yamamoto, by the Deputy Chair of the High Peace Council, Habiba Sarabi, and by the founding Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, Mariam Safi.

The debate focused on political developments in Afghanistan and on developments in the peace process, paying particular attention to the participation of women in those processes. Many Security Council members welcomed the outcome of the second meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation in Afghanistan on 28 February, addressed the ongoing preparations for the elections in 2018 and, in spite of progress made, expressed concern about the security situation, including with regard to continued terrorist acts, an increase in drug production and trafficking and the high number of civilian casualties. Many Council members also welcomed the strong commitment of the Government of Afghanistan towards the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda. Specific consideration was also given to the relevance of the full and effective participation and leadership of women in decision-making, including in national, regional and international institutions and in mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict.

Ahead of the debate, the Security Council renewed the mandate of UNAMA for one year, until 17 March 2019, through the adoption of resolution 2405 (2018). The core mandate of the Mission remained unchanged, and language was updated and strengthened with regard to the peace process, the upcoming elections, efforts to counter terrorism and narcotics, the protection of civilians, human rights, accountability and the effective and meaningful political participation of women and women's rights groups. The Council welcomed the findings of the strategic review of the Mission conducted in 2017 and called for the implementation of the recommendations of the Secretary-General.

On 15 March the Security Council issued a press statement in which Council members welcomed the convening of the second meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation on 28 February and commended the declaration agreed to by its participants. The members of the Council underlined the importance of an inclusive, Afghan-led and -owned peace process to the long-term prosperity and stability of Afghanistan, and expressed their full support for the Afghan Government's commitment to developing a practical plan for reconciliation.

On 21 March the Security Council issued a press statement in which Council members condemned in the strongest terms the heinous and cowardly terrorist attack that had taken place that day in Kabul, on the holiday of Nowruz, which resulted in at least 33 people killed and 65 injured, for which ISIL had claimed responsibility.

Yemen

On 15 March, the Security Council issued a presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/5) regarding the humanitarian situation in Yemen. In the statement the

Council called for the full and sustained opening of all ports in Yemen, called for increased access to Sana'a airport and called on all parties to the conflict to allow and facilitate the safe, rapid and unhindered access of humanitarian supplies and personnel to all affected governorates. The Council expressed grave distress at the level of violence in Yemen, including the indiscriminate attacks in densely populated areas, and the impact they had had upon civilians, including large numbers of civilian casualties and damage to civilian objects. The Council called on all parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and underlined the need to ensure accountability for violations in Yemen. The Council condemned in the strongest possible terms ballistic missile attacks by the Houthis against Saudi Arabia and reiterated its call on all parties to agree on the modalities for a durable cessation of hostilities. The Council further called on all parties to the conflict to abandon preconditions and engage in good faith with the United Nations-led process, with the meaningful participation of women and other underrepresented groups at all levels, and welcomed the appointment of Martin Griffiths as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen.

On 28 March the Security Council issued a press statement in which it condemned the 26 March ballistic missile attack on Saudi Arabia in the strongest possible terms. The members of the Council called on all Member States to fully implement all aspects of the arms embargo, as required by the relevant Council resolutions. They expressed their grave concern at the continued deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Yemen and the devastating humanitarian impact of the conflict on civilians, and called on all parties to the conflict to allow and facilitate safe, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access.

Lebanon

On 20 March, the Security Council held closed consultations of the whole on the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2018/210). The Council was briefed by the Acting Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Pernille Dahler Kardel, and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations. Their briefings focused on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), the fulfilment of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and on the state of play regarding the recommendations of the Force's review.

Following the consultations, the President of the Security Council informed the press of the following conclusions: the members of the Council reaffirmed their strong support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon, as well as their commitment to the full implementation of all provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). They also commended the role of UNIFIL in maintaining calm along the Blue Line and its cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces with the aim of extending the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory. They recalled the proactive steps that UNIFIL had taken to operationalize resolution 2373 (2017) and encouraged UNIFIL to continue those efforts. The members of the Council also welcomed the outcome of the ministerial meeting in support of the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces, held in Rome on 15 March, as it displayed a unity of vision on the part of the Lebanese Government and the enduring support of the international community for the legitimate security institutions of Lebanon. Finally, they reaffirmed their support for the ongoing efforts of the Lebanese authorities to restore normal functioning of institutions and for the holding of legislative elections on 6 May 2018.

The Security Council issued a press statement on 27 March welcoming the joint statement issued by the participants of the ministerial meeting held in Rome on 15 March in support of the Lebanese State security institutions. Highlighting several

aspects of the meeting's outcome, the statement also called on all Lebanese parties to resume discussions towards a consensus on a national defence strategy and urged all Lebanese parties to implement and further expand without delay a tangible policy of disassociation, as a matter of priority, to shield Lebanon from regional conflicts and to refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of other States, as spelled out in previous declarations, in particular the Baabda Declaration of 2012.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

On 26 March, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, delivered his quarterly report on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) during a briefing to the Security Council; the briefing was followed by consultations of the whole. He underscored that developments on the ground could not be seen in isolation from the political context, and that all the elements of his report derived from the lack of a political horizon. He also emphasized the possible dramatic consequences of the $446 million funding gap of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). With regard to the specific provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), he pointed out the continuous settlement activities, demolitions and legislative actions on the part of Israel aimed at impeding future territorial transfers to the State of Palestine and equating legal norms in the West Bank and Israel. On the topic of violence and incitement, the Special Coordinator confirmed that tensions were growing in the West Bank, as well as in and around Gaza, since the decision on 6 December 2017 by one Member State to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and noted the attack against the Palestinian Prime Minister, Rami Hamdallah, in that context. Separately, he called on Israel to calibrate its use of force and, in particular, to use lethal force as a last resort. Despite some positive developments in the framework of finance and economic cooperation between the two sides as well as in intra-Palestinian efforts at reconciliation, the Gazan economy remained on the brink of collapse. As a result, the Special Coordinator welcomed the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians in Brussels on 20 March, which was preceded by meetings in Cairo and in Washington, D.C., and followed by the pledging conference for the Gaza desalination plant. He appreciated recent decisions by Israel to approve residential and private sector construction projects as well as the continuation of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism. But none of the positive unilateral measures in Area C and Gaza taken by Israel were transformative, and economic development, while critical, was no substitute for sovereignty and Statehood.

Noting the decision of one State to transfer its embassy to Jerusalem on 14 May for the seventieth anniversary of the independence of Israel, he underscored that any deviation from the consensus positions on final status issues would be dangerous.

Two members delivered strongly worded statements in the open chamber, denouncing the violation by Israel of international law as well as the planned transfer of the embassy of the United States of America embassy to Jerusalem. They called upon Israel to lift the blockade in Gaza and called for urgent donor mobilization to salvage UNRWA operations. The two members also urged the Secretary-General to report in writing on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). Several representatives used the opportunity to condemn the indiscriminate missile attacks by the Houthis against Saudi Arabia and expressed full solidarity with all the measures Saudi Arabia took to protect itself. There were no further findings to present to the press.

On 30 March the Security Council held an emergency meeting on Gaza. The Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, delivered a briefing based on reports emanating from the two sides. He stated that most of the

30,000 participants in that day's demonstration in Gaza reportedly stayed away from the fence and did not engage in violence, but that 15 Palestinians were killed and more than 1,000 injured, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. He noted that some demonstrators were reportedly carrying weapons and he indicated that Israel claimed that militants had tried to plant improvised explosive devices in the area of separation. He mentioned the reported presence of Hamas militants and leaders on the site and allegations that a 9-year-old girl had been sent across the fence, noting that Israeli troops sent her back safely. He stressed that Israel must uphold its responsibilities under international humanitarian law and use lethal force only as a last resort, and that any fatalities must be investigated.

Most Security Council members condemned the recent violence in Gaza and called on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and actions that could further escalate the situation. Some representatives called on Israel to respect international humanitarian law and use force in a proportional manner and only as a last resort. A few representatives also condemned all forms of terrorist acts. Several members noted the Special Coordinator's recent briefing on 26 March in which he repeatedly warned of the potential for an escalation of violence in Gaza. Some representatives took the opportunity to speak on the question of Palestine in a more general context and noted the urgency of implementing resolution 2334 (2016) and supporting the two-State solution. They further called on Israel to cease all settlement activities and noted the serious repercussions of the UNRWA funding shortage for security and stability in the region. Most Council members expressed the wish for a Council decision that would serve to de-escalate the situation.

The Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations started by addressing the Palestinian people directly in Arabic, commending their resistance and participation in the demonstrations. He then stressed that the response by Israel to the peaceful demonstrations had been a massacre and called on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and hold Israel accountable for its violations. Israel did not participate in the Council meeting owing to the Passover holiday, a fact that several representatives regretted. One Council member underlined the hope that the Council could accommodate Israel under more suitable circumstances, noting the importance of maintaining the appropriate balance in the Council.

United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

On 27 March, the Security Council held closed consultations on the report of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). The Council was briefed by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations. His briefing focused on the volatile operational environment of UNDOF, the mission's progress towards redeployment on the Bravo side, and the need for technologically advanced equipment.

Following closed consultations of the whole, the President of the Security Council informed the press of the Council's strong support for UNDOF, the troop-contributing countries and the women and men serving in the mission. The Council members expressed deep concern over the recent escalation of tension between the parties, urged them to fully uphold the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, exercise maximum restraint and maintain liaison with UNDOF at all times. In addition, they expressed strong concerns over the presence of armed groups in the UNDOF area of operations, reiterating that UNDOF was the only authorized military presence in the area of separation. The Council welcomed the mission's progress towards gradual redeployment towards the Bravo side and emphasized the need for a strict conditions-based approach to any further redeployment in order to ensure adequate force protection and medical evacuation capacity. Lastly, the members of the Council

underlined the importance for UNDOF to be able to deploy technologically advanced equipment so as to effectively fulfil its mandate and enhance force protection, and called upon the parties to support the deployment of the "sense and warning systems".

Thematic issues

Maintenance of international peace and security: conflict and hunger

On 23 March, the Security Council held a thematic briefing on the maintenance of international peace and security, focusing on the connection between conflict and hunger in certain conflict situations, chaired by the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands. The Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), David Beasley, and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator briefed the Council, the former on behalf of agencies based in Rome: WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

On 22 March the European Union, FAO and WFP released a report, entitled "Global Report on Food Crises 2018",[1] which pointed to surging levels of acute hunger largely attributable to new or intensified conflict. According to the report, conflict continued to be the main driver of acute food insecurity in 18 countries, and it would likely remain a major driver of food crises in 2018, affecting Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, northeast Nigeria and the Lake Chad region, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, as well as Libya and the central Sahel region (Mali and the Niger).

Lack of compliance with international humanitarian law in such respects is evident in the situations on the agenda of the Security Council. The Panel of Experts on South Sudan, who monitor the Council's sanctions regime for that country, reported in November 2017 that the Government of South Sudan had been using food as a weapon of war to inflict suffering on civilians, and that its deliberate prevention of food assistance had caused death by starvation. A report in January 2018 by the Panel of Experts on Yemen similarly described the blockade by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition as using the threat of starvation as an instrument of war. The Under-Secretary-General highlighted attacks targeting bakeries in the Syrian Arab Republic and warned that assistance across conflict lines to besieged areas had collapsed in recent months. He predicted that, if the denial of humanitarian access continued, more people would die from starvation and disease than from hostilities.

As part of his briefing, the Under-Secretary-General highlighted the responsibilities of belligerents under international humanitarian law. The Executive Director referred to operational challenges that WFP faced in its relief efforts, and to the enormous additional costs of delivering food assistance in conflict situations.

During the ensuing discussion, many members of the Security Council agreed that the conduct of hostilities by warring parties causes food insecurity in many of today's conflicts by restricting humanitarian access or directly attacking sources of production and infrastructure for delivering food, such as farmland, livestock and roads. Increased food prices as a result of conflict also affect food security. Members stressed the importance of focusing attention on the Council's role in addressing those challenges and reaffirming countries' obligations to comply with international humanitarian law, including the prohibition of the starvation of civilians as a tactic of war and the responsibility of belligerents to protect civilians in areas under their control. The persistent failure to comply with existing law could be addressed by

[1] Available at https://www.wfp.org/content/global-report-food-crises-2018.

ensuring accountability for those that — deliberately or not — aggravate or create situations of food insecurity in conflicts. Some members referred to other factors that contribute to food insecurity among conflict-affected countries, such as drought, climate change and extreme poverty.

Members considered ways the Security Council could remain informed of conflict situations in which worrying levels of food insecurity arose and of the cooperation between humanitarian and development actors to tackle food insecurity in conflict situations more effectively.

Open debate on United Nations peacekeeping operations

On 28 March, the Security Council held a thematic open debate on the theme "Collective action to improve United Nations peacekeeping operations". The Council was briefed by the Secretary-General, António Guterres, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and the Director of the Malian non-governmental organization Women's Action, Research, Study and Training Group, Fatimata Touré. The Secretary-General used his briefing to announce his new initiative on renewed commitment for peacekeeping "Action for Peacekeeping". The Chairperson of the African Union Commission stressed the need for joint action by the United Nations and the African Union and the need for sustainable financing of regional African peacekeeping missions. Finally, the Director briefed the Council on her analysis of the dire situation in northern Mali.

The debate, presided over by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, saw a total of 72 interventions, 14 of them by ministers. Member States discussed ways to improve United Nations peacekeeping operations. Many Security Council members welcomed the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative and emphasized the importance of strengthening political processes and the improved training and equipping of peacekeepers under realistic and achievable mandates. They also emphasized the importance of prevention and early warning, combating sexual exploitation and abuse and the need for adequate medical evacuation capabilities. Some Council members also stressed the need for enhanced consultation with troop-contributing countries as well as with host nations. The need to unconditionally adhere to the United Nations principles of peacekeeping was also mentioned. Speakers from the wider membership echoed many of those points and, inter alia, supported the recommendations of the report entitled "Improving security of United Nations peacekeepers: we need to change the we are doing business" (the Cruz report)[2] and stressed the need for well-trained and well-equipped troops, including improved force generation; an emphasis on rotation schemes for critical enablers; reliable medical evacuation capabilities; the need for clear, well-structured and sequenced mandates, including a call for more efficient protection of civilians mandates where applicable; more delegation of duties to mission areas; adequate funding; zero-tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse; and an increase in the number of female peacekeepers. In addition, Member States also stressed the need for strong political processes for conflict resolution through negotiated peace settlements, stronger partnerships with regional organizations, better peacekeeping intelligence, better triangular cooperation and the implementation of security sector reform policies, and the need to address the root causes of conflict. Troop-contributing countries emphasized that performance also depended on capacities, and called for strong cooperation with other troop-contributing countries to implement the recommendations of the Cruz report.

[2] Available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/improving_security_of_united_nations_peacekeepers_report.pdf.

International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals

On 19 March, the Security Council issued a presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/6) establishing the procedures for conducting a review of the work of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, as provided for in resolution 1966 (2010) and required for the extension of its work for the next two years.